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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

4 June 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CONSULTANTS

SUBJECT: Turkey: A Regime in Trouble

1. Turkey is passing through a time of turmoil. The freely elected government of Suleyman Demirel, which found it increasingly difficult to maintain law and order, was forced out in March 1971 by an ultimatum from the senior generals. It was replaced by a largely non-representative government formed with only token participation from the major political parties by Nihat Erim, an experienced and generally respected politician. Martial law has been clamped on Turkey's largest cities and some other parts of the country. In this situation, the mood of confidence that Turkey was moving effectively toward its goal of becoming a powerful, modern state accepted as an important member of the world community has been rudely shaken. Indeed, these events raise the question of whether the present Turkish regime has sufficient flexibility to meet the mounting challenges it faces.

S-E-C-R-E-T

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I. PROBLEMS

A. Parliamentary Paralysis

2. Turkey's dramatic difficulties reflect deep problems in society. In the political realm, the very future of the democratic system is at stake. The parliamentary process has encountered growing challenges in recent years. Supposing the centralization of power in a one-house parliament to have been responsible for the excesses of the Menderes decade of the 1950s, the framers of the 1961 Constitution elaborated an extensive set of checks and balances. Further, in accord with this philosophy, the new electoral law introduced proportional representation which effectively limited the size of the ruling party's majority and assured splinter parties representation. Even more important in this context was the explicit constitutional confirmation of the military establishment's right to address political issues.

3. As intended, these constraints curtailed the government's freedom of action. During his tenure as Prime Minister from 1965 to 1971, Demirel, who was by nature a conciliator rather than a leader, was reluctant to use his parliamentary majority to enact controversial legislation opposed by the Republican Peoples Party (RPP) which presumed to speak for the bulk of the

S-E-C-R-E-T

educated elite. Demirel's freedom of action was further constricted by the parliamentary revolt within his own party after the 1969 elections which left him a hairline majority in the lower house. Thus for a year before the top generals finally forced him to resign in March 1971, the government had limped along, showing its muscle only by acts, such as the devaluation of August 1970, which did not depend directly on parliamentary approval. This style of rule fed dissatisfaction with present constitutional arrangements and stimulated yearning for more decisive government, encouraging some politicians to question the validity of the democratic process for Turkey.

4. Against this background, the mounting frustration of educated elements, most of whom still favor the elitist, reformist, semi-authoritarian approach inherited from the Ataturk era, assumed new significance. The important segment of the Turkish power structure traditionally grouped around the RPP has never seen their party win a freely contested election. While the RPP leaders still profess confidence that the masses will come to support their reformist approach, some former party members have already abandoned hope in the electoral process and

- 3 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

have been urging another military takeover.* The 86-year old Inonu, prestigious hero of the establishment of the Turkish Republic, categorically opposes such military intervention. But the failure of the RPP that he leads to improve its position at the polls has weakened the thrust of his argument.

5. In Turkey, the military establishment traditionally identifies with the reformist elite. The military career has offered rural elements the educational opportunities they needed to achieve status in society. And having shared power with the reformist elite for some 30 years prior to 1950, the top ranks of the officer corps, at least, appear generally to share the authoritarian, statist outlook inherited from Ataturk. No simple label adequately describes their approach. But they take seriously their role as protectors of the regime, not only from external enemies but also from disruptive domestic elements, particularly any who call for an assault on the system. The generals want an orderly society in which public service is set as the highest good, with its rewards in wealth and power. Private

* Some of the founders of *Devrim*, a periodical promoting a military takeover, were former members of the RPP. *Devrim* was closed sine die by the martial law authorities in May 1971.

S-E-C-R-E-T

enterprise and the production of individual capital through trade or industry rank at the bottom of their value system.

6. Yet while the officer corps has been notably unhappy with the deterioration of public order, the taint of speculation by civilian politicians, and the failure to enact significant social reforms, the senior generals are aware of the drawbacks in ruling Turkey through the armed forces and may even recognize their own limitations of experience with the problems of civil rule. Hence, though the generals did concert to oust Demirel to seek more forceful leadership to deal with Turkey's pressing needs, they have shown themselves genuinely reluctant to take power directly.

B. Urban Terrorism

7. The proximate cause of the installation of the Erim government was the rise of politically motivated violence toward the end of 1970. Much as crimes of violence are common in Turkey, the commission of such ordinary crimes as bank robbery, murder, kidnapping, and arson for political ends had been virtually unknown. In the past there had been occasions of broad resistance to governmental pressures, but popular movements and demonstrations had aimed to prevent perversion of the

legally constituted political process, not to destroy the system. Moreover, though the police had at times been discredited for partisan application of the law, the armed forces enjoyed a wide reputation for impartiality that commanded respect throughout Turkish society. Thus the rise of an "urban guerrilla" movement, inspired by the exploits of Che Guevara, Regis Debray and others which defied the army, loomed as a totally new and disturbing phenomenon.

8. We cannot yet draw a clear profile of the tiny band of urban terrorists. But from the scattered evidence available, it is apparent that they are products of the failings of the Turkish educational system. Education has been the hallmark of the elite in Turkey, the pathway to status and power. Since the Republic, Turkish regimes have regarded the school as an essential agency for social reform and the ultimate means to consolidate gains achieved in the first instance by government fiat. In this context, adulation of the student as the guardian of reform has whetted the desire and expectation of those in universities to play a major part in ordering Turkey's destiny. Especially since the 1960 military takeover -- which came in the wake of university demonstrations -- students in Turkey have exaggerated their importance and power in society.

S-E-C-R-E-T

9. The rise of the radical student movement was a distinguishing mark of the 1960s. Student organizations first demanded reform of the antiquated university system, but soon branched out to demand wholesale changes in Turkey's domestic and foreign policy. Cries for educational reform initially met warm response outside university circles -- even Demirel acknowledged the justice of complaints against examination procedures, overcrowding of classes, and harsh student living conditions. But student demands for basic social reform aroused antipathy in some influential segments of the elite, including the Justice Party (JP), Turkey's largest political organization.

10. Student discontent drew impetus from a number of sources. On the one hand, the 1960s were a time of rapidly expanding higher education. Several new universities opened during this period, turning out vastly increased numbers of graduates. But although Turkey's economy was expanding by an average of about seven percent a year after the mid-1960s, there was a dearth of jobs offering suitable status and rewards to the rapidly swelling ranks of recent graduates. Traditional prejudices against private enterprise still prevailed widely

- 7 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

among the student population. Yet the government bureaucracy, customarily the employer of preference for university graduates, was unable to absorb these growing numbers of educated elements. While the dimensions of this problem have not become as critical as in some other underdeveloped countries, nevertheless, the difficulty in finding employment of acceptable status has provided a fertile field for dissidence.

11. Since 1960 as well the universities have been the scene of wide-ranging ideological debate. Particularly after the Cyprus crisis of mid-1964 showed that US and Turkish interests were not entirely congruent, some of the younger professors especially began to sow suspicion of Western capitalism. It became stylish in Turkish universities to explain Turkey's backwardness as the result of Western, and particularly US, economic imperialism. From this it was only a short step to believing that the US was effectively intervening in Turkish affairs to keep "progressive" elements from power. Under the influence of these views, some of the more activist students turned to explore the "classics of Marxism-Leninism" and then branched out to Maoism and the revolutionary approach of the Cubans, North Vietnamese, and the Arab guerrillas. Thanks to the

- 8 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

permissive atmosphere of the 1960s in Turkey, translations and commentary on these subjects were for the first time readily available in quantity. And the universities, with their autonomy and relative immunity from ordinary police regulations, became a haven for a small number of radical protestors.

12. No doubt the revolutionary student movement was influenced to some degree by factors outside Turkey. The example of the French students in challenging de Gaulle in mid-1968 clearly encouraged their Turkish counterparts to pursue an activist course. Turkish students have followed closely events in American universities. We have no hard evidence on the role of Soviet or other foreign missions in stimulating student disorder, though Soviet officials have had contact with Turkish student radicals. The well-known clandestine Bizim Radyo continually criticized government efforts to control student dissidence; no act of terrorism has yet been condemned by Moscow. A few Turkish students have also apparently traveled to Communist China. Nonetheless, the indications of direct Soviet, Chinese Communist, Cuban or other involvement in the Turkish radical student movement are so peripheral that there seems little

- 9 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

ground for accepting the "Communist" label now hung on these radicals by the Ankara regime. In essence the Turkish student activists appear to be a home-grown product.

13. By the late 1960s a hard core of student activists was drawn increasingly to violence to express its extremist point of view. But these tactics rapidly eroded the sympathy the earlier demands for university reform had engendered among the Turkish elite. The officer corps, which may be receptive to the argument that Turkey needs more or less radical social reform, obviously feels itself directly challenged by the urban terrorists. Indeed, the need to crush this movement to its roots is being raised as an argument for more direct and longer military intervention in the political process. Although there is some evidence that elements in the RPP and others of a like persuasion are concerned over the wide sweep of repression launched by the government against all those even "remotely related" with stimulating the terrorists, there is clearly general revulsion against tactics such as the kidnapping-murder of the Israeli Consul General. And from the rising tide of informers against the urban guerrilla movement, it seems apparent that there are few elements in Turkish society that now support this movement.

- 10 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

14. Although the Turkish government attributes the urban guerrilla movement to a tiny coterie of leftists, the Ankara regime has rounded up numerous professors, writers, and journalists who might in some way have inspired lawlessness. The authorities have banned nearly 100 books, newspapers, and periodicals -- from do-it-yourself instructions on guerrilla war to the strategy of anti-imperialist war in Turkey. Among those singled out for prosecution by the martial law command have been the leaders of Turkey's only socialist party, the Turkish Labor Party (TLP). Turkish security officials have long considered the TLP a Communist-front organization -- though the evidence for this charge appears far from conclusive -- and the party's support for radical student movements provides a convenient pretext for retaliation. Indeed, the martial law commanders have now effectively silenced the left in Turkey, depriving it of all legitimate outlets for its strident views.

C. Kurdish Separatism

15. A perennial problem highlighted by the martial law regime has been that of Kurdish separatism. The Kurds, who form a heavy majority in almost all the provinces of southeastern Turkey, number perhaps 3-4 million of the some 35 million

- 11 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

people in the country as a whole. The areas they inhabit are the least developed and least modernized section of Turkey, lagging far behind the western regions in standard of living, in industrialization, in emancipation from traditional mores and social structure, or in any other accouterments of modernity. Development expenditures by the central government also have been less in these regions than elsewhere in Turkey; and the economic backwardness of the area has enhanced the differences between the Kurds and the Turkish majority.

16. Ankara governments have generally adopted a firm policy toward evidences of Kurdish aspirations for autonomy. Suspected Kurdish nationalist agitators have regularly been hauled into court and sentenced to lengthy jail terms. Yet at least on the cultural level, Kurdish poets and writers have continued to agitate for autonomy. Though precise statistics are unavailable, it also seems that Kurds have been disproportionately drawn into the radical student movement to express their rebellion. The martial law authorities claim to have uncovered evidence of concrete plotting among Kurds in eastern Turkey to break off to form an independent state in conjunction with Mullah Mustafa Barzani in northern Iraq; Ankara has announced the discovery

- 12 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

of sufficient weapons cached to arm more than a regiment with rifles, machine guns, and submachine guns.

17. It is difficult to evaluate this evidence of active Kurdish separatism. The Kurds, split as they are into rival, competing tribal agglomerations, have never displayed a cohesive front to the outside world, even during their rebellions during the 1920s and 1930s. Much as some groups in Turkey may admire Barzani, others certainly nourish long-standing grievances against him. Thus it seems unlikely that there was any plan for a general rising by the Turkish Kurds to unite with their Iraqi confreres. Arms smuggling is endemic among the Kurds, who traditionally have carried guns; the weapons uncovered by the security forces may have been largely intended for sale to Iraqi Kurds. In any event, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the lightly armed Kurds could hardly hope to confront the well-armed and determined Turkish army.

II. PROSPECTS

18. Nihat Erim does not view his regime as an interim expedient to carry out limited reforms and retire gracefully

S-E-C-R-E-T

as soon as possible. He is ambitious and undoubtedly sees this his opportunity to build a sufficient power base to remain in contention for the position of top leadership in Turkey for some time to come. Thus, unless pushed out by the military establishment, Erim will probably try to serve out the full parliamentary term ending in October 1973. By that point he might hope to have neutralized the left wing of the RPP, his old party, so that he could at least return to the fold with a strong claim on the leadership of the party.

19. The problem of restructuring parliament to avoid the paralysis of the past and to exclude "undesirable" elements will be hard to solve. The reformist elite, typified by Erim, wishes to amend the election law and, if necessary, the constitution to limit the franchise in some way to insure that the RPP can win elections. There is no obvious change that would offer assurance of achieving this end. For example, it is doubtful that even a radical measure restricting the franchise to those who are literate or have at least primary education would have the effect of reducing the relative majority of JP votes, as some of the most backward areas have provided a significant proportion of RPP votes in the past. Naturally,

S-E-C-R-E-T

any blatantly partisan move would fracture the coalition support Erim's government now enjoys.

20. Yet until this conundrum is cracked, the military establishment will probably refuse to back very far out of its present position of checking the government's every move. If the conspicuous role now played by the generals continues for a prolonged period, the concept of the military establishment sharing power openly with the civilians may become entrenched. In this event, democratic practices in Turkey would be tenuous at best. The resulting strains and frustrations could lead to renewed military upheavals and to outright abandonment of even a facade of democratic procedure.

21. This poses a cruel dilemma for the JP. Demirel and his colleagues are probably prepared to wait until the 1973 elections before making another bid for power. If elections are not scheduled by the normal 1973 date, the JP will undoubtedly grow restive and be tempted to withdraw cooperation from the regime. There is little that the JP can do, however, to press effectively for elections, as any resistance would probably strengthen the determination of the military to keep its commanding role. In fact, were the JP to withdraw its support

- 15 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

from the Erim government, it would create a political crisis which could bring civilian rule to an end.

22. The urban guerrilla movement is probably a transient phenomenon. The military is willing to use all necessary force to crush it. Moreover, its reservoirs of sympathy have dried up outside of a few tiny committed extremists on the left. Erim is likely to make good on his promise to bring the universities to heel by curtailing their immunities, especially to normal police procedures. These changes would make it extremely difficult for the terrorist movement to revive, even if martial law is relaxed. Any effort to organize guerrilla activity in rural areas would be even more difficult to sustain.

23. In any event, the scope of political debate is likely to be restricted for some time to come. The TLP might even be abolished. Already for practical purposes it has ceased to operate. Constitutional amendments may even be proposed to prevent formation of parties close to the extremes of left and right. The assumption of many on the extreme left that a military regime would eventually favor their cause does not seem likely to come true. Thus far, the officers have taken the lead in encouraging repression of the left. And particularly

- 16 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

in the revulsion generated by the activities of the urban terrorists, it seems highly unlikely that the military will ever look to such elements for guidance or inspiration.

24. Nonetheless, repression is not apt to make the university scene more than superficially quiet. The strains that spawned the movement of political violence are not susceptible to easy solution. It will be difficult to adapt the present university system to produce graduates that fit existing social needs. Nor is it likely that any early consensus will be reached on the role of the university graduate in society. Hence, if freedom of expression is restored, the universities are likely again to become a focal point of discontent with the regime.

III. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

25. For the moment, the US is benefiting from the restrictions on the expression of leftist views in Turkey. These elements consider the US their declared enemy; even before martial law was imposed, some critics of the US were promoting the line that the military move to dump Demirel had been directed by Washington. Now these voices are

- 17 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

necessarily stilled, and the US is being lambasted only in organs from outside Turkey, such as the clandestine Bizim Radyo. And, indeed, the excesses of the terrorists may have generated some sympathy for the US.

26. But the US is apt to experience increasing difficulties in working with the Erim regime. The elitist approach is compounded of nationalist sensitivity. Erim's program and the pronouncements of Cabinet figures indicate that the new regime may be more rigorous in pressing Turkey's own interests at the expense of those of her allies. American private investment may be particularly affected: the Erim government is committed to take over certain mining and mineral ventures and to tightening terms of others. The repatriation of foreign exchange is also likely to be made increasingly difficult. In short, Turkey is likely to become a considerably less welcoming place for American private investment.

27. There will also be an impact on government-to-government relations. Turkey and the US have been engaged in negotiating subsidiary implementing agreements for activities and facilities operated under the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) of July 1969. These implementing accords were to be

- 18 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

completed by July 1970; thus far none has been concluded. The essential sticking point has been the insistence of the Turkish military establishment on regaining the concessions made by the civilian authorities in the DCA. The soldiers are adamant in their desire to gain explicit authority to control the details of US operations in Turkey. With the general rise of military assertiveness in Turkey, therefore, the prospects of the Erim government being able to induce the soldiers to back down seems small.

28. Rising nationalist sensitivity also impinges on the opium question -- a matter of increasing importance to the US. The Demirel government talked sweetly about first eliminating, then merely restricting, opium production. It also cooperated with US narcotics officials. But

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[redacted]
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[redacted] the JP did not assign a high priority to solving this problem.

29. Erim recognizes the "humanitarian" obligation to stop opium production in Turkey. But he wishes to avoid giving the appearance of acting under US pressure. Thus his government is pressing Washington to give him a breathing spell

- 19 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

and to work through multilateral, rather than bilateral, channels on this issue. It is difficult to predict whether or not Erim will prove a more effective collaborator with the US on opium matters than his predecessor. Those in his government do not have ties to the illicit producers, nor does his government depend on the political support of poppy growing regions. On the other hand, he has been deeply pre-occupied with other matters more pressing to the survival of the regime. The question of opium -- which is not a social problem in Turkey -- can scarcely compete in Erim's eyes with many of the other demands on his time. Hence, even if Erim does take a more effective stand against the diversion of opium into illicit channels, he is not likely to move either as speedily or as completely as the US would wish.

- 20 -

S-E-C-R-E-T